

**To: The Public Health Committee**

**From: Carol Burkhart-Lyons**

**Director, The Naugatuck Valley Project, Inc.**

**Date: March 14, 2007**

My name is Carol Burkhart-Lyons and I reside in Waterbury, CT. I am the Director of the Naugatuck Valley Project (NVP) in Waterbury, CT. NVP is an organizing coalition of 25 churches, unions and community organizations whose mission it is to organize around jobs and quality of life issues that affect the families of the Naugatuck Valley from Torrington down to Shelton. **I am addressing S.B. 1342** and am in favor of the **concept**. I am asking that you consider the concept for trained, certified interpreters although we don't expect the state to be responsible for providing that training only the certification and adopt standards.

Naugatuck Valley Project has currently been asking the legislature to pass S.B. 198 that provides Medicaid reimbursement for medical providers that treat the limited English proficiency (LEP) population, **and** we also would like those interpreters, whoever hires them, to follow the National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care put out by the NIHC: National Council on Interpreting in Health Care ([www.ncihc.org](http://www.ncihc.org)).

*(The estimated cost of providing interpreter services to all Medicaid beneficiaries is approximately \$4.7 million of which half will be paid by the Federal government match (50% match). **(2.3. Million)**)*

My passion for this issue comes from having deaf mute parents and having to interpret all my life, and having immigrant grandparents from Poland and Italy.

Laws regarding serving the LEP people in Connecticut are in violation of Federal Title VI, the Ct. State law, the HIPPA law, and moral laws, because we are not providing proper health care to LEP in their own language. We must provide the best of care to everyone—even people who are Limited English Proficient.

Health care professionals tell us they are literally “tongue tied” because they cannot speak to folks who are LEP and seriously health care. In our focus groups up and down the Valley with LEP people, we heard story after story of dead children, aborted fetuses, neglected and terrified elderly, and young school children taken out of school to convey diagnoses that are too complicated to interpret. These were services that institutions are bound by law to provide themselves.

Immigrants are here in our state and it is our duty to provide them care when they need it. It can be a matter of life and death.

**Mercedes Bagley of Oakville, tells the story, in Spanish, about her friend who went to an area hospital to get prenatal care but ended up**

having a miscarriage while in the waiting room because they couldn't understand that she was asking for prenatal care.

Felicia Diaz of Waterbury was hospitalized after a friend tried to interpret for her. The friend inadvertently told a doctor that Felicia had gonorrhea instead of diarrhea. "Felicia was treated for gonorrhea for three days before the doctors discovered that the diagnosis was wrong" said Liz Rosa, bi-lingual community organizer for the Naugatuck Valley Project, Inc. based in Waterbury.

*Certification of health care interpreters and providing standards* can open up this market for health care workers and will be a boom to the health care industry. Even now some insurance companies provide reimbursement through their policies. If we create jobs through professionally trained interpreters, we will open up more markets for competitive services Valley health care industry-related businesses that are the main employers.

The Valley's largest town, Waterbury alone, has led the state in joblessness in the past two years.

Let's put a stop to unfunded mandates and let's get on with providing proper high quality health care and build up our health care industry for our own sakes.